

Love

in the

New Testament

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I. Chalmers



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Love

in the

New Testament

Dwight M. Chalmers

**BOARD OF WOMEN'S WORK
Presbyterian Church in the United States
Presbyterian Center
341-A Ponce de Leon Avenue, N.E.
Atlanta 5, Georgia**

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Acknowledgment

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Board of Women's Work
Presbyterian Church in the United States

Appreciation

Sincere appreciation is expressed to the Reverend Dwight M. Chalmers for the valuable service he has rendered in preparing this special Bible study for the Women of the Church for the year 1955.

The 1955 Emphasis—*Personal Christian Faith*—is basic to the development of the study. Specific help is afforded through the "Thought Questions" at the end of each chapter and for the individual woman in *The Presbyterian Woman's Workbook*.

Through the use of this material the BOARD OF WOMEN'S WORK anticipates a study of the Bible that will deepen faith and lead to new ventures in Christian service.

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For Reading and Further Study

No one book has been found dealing with *Love* in the Bible as a whole. Several of the chapters in this booklet carry footnotes suggesting excellent source material and from which the author has quoted. In addition to those mentioned in the book these few are suggested:

Christian Love—by Paul E. Johnson. Abingdon Press. \$3.

The Christian Fellowship—Nels F. S. Ferré. Harper and Brothers. \$2.50.

Evil and the Christian Faith—Nels F. S. Ferré. Harper and Brothers. \$2.50.

The author of *Love in the New Testament* also recommends articles on "Christian Love" in *Bible Dictionaries* and any suitable books on *Theology and Christian Ethics*.

Any good commentary on the passages marked out for this special study will add to the richness of your thought.

Suggestions to Leader

Love in the New Testament has been prepared by Dwight M. Chalmers at the request of the Board of Women's Work. It is designed to help leaders direct the special Bible study of the Women of the Church in 1955.

There has been special preparation for this study. A few years ago the women of the Church studied *These Things Abide* (The Ten Commandments) and concluded the study with "the fulfillment of the Law is love." More recently they studied *The Holy Spirit and Today* and concluded with "the fruit of the Spirit is love." With this background we enter upon the study of *Love in the New Testament* to discover what this love is, how it operates, what it can accomplish, the power there is in it, and what difference it should make in our lives.

It is suggested that plans be made to have the special Bible study of the Women of the Church in small neighborhood groups, in order that it be made a real Bible-study experience for all the women, with opportunity for informal, frank discussion of the ways Christian love should operate here and now in every relationship.

The Scripture passages at the beginning of each chapter are to be read and studied together in the group, the leader directing the group to look for some specific thing in the passages read. For the study the group might be divided into smaller units of from four to five women and to each of these groups would be assigned one of the passages with definite suggestions of what to look for as they read. From ten to fifteen minutes would be used in these groups studying the passage. The leader would then gather the findings and the whole group would discuss its meaning for today and the specific application to be made to our lives.

In *The Presbyterian Woman's Workbook* for 1955 there is a guide to the personal study of *Love in the New Testament*. The material there is directly in line with the material in this book and might also be used in group study. The leader might direct the women to make use of it in personal study between class sessions. She would then make opportunity for the women to share their findings in the group and plan to make definite use of their contributions.

It will be necessary for women to have Bibles in hand for this type of study to be used. The leader will need to encourage them to bring their own Bibles.*

A blackboard or wallboard made of brown wrapping paper on which can be recorded in crayon the contributions that come from the women. This will help the group to see the development of the lesson subject, and will hold before them the truths that should guide the discussion as the group seeks practical ways for the working out of love in their daily lives.

The studies in this book will give you as leader a better understanding of the Scripture passages and material from which you may draw to enrich the study as you direct the women to discover the truth of God's Word on this all-important subject of Christian love.

* The author uses the *Revised Standard Version* but *King James Version* will serve as well.

The First Commandment of All

Basic passages for your study: *Matthew 22:34-40; Deuteronomy 6:1-9*

Have You Checked the Price Tags?

The mere fact of being alive (though there is nothing "mere" about it) calls for a never-ending series of daily choices. Every waking hour, and sometimes in our sleep, we say to ourselves, "This is very important. It demands my immediate attention." Or, we may say, "That has little value to me; I shall ignore it for the present." Some things we label, "A-1"; others we promptly toss into the wastebasket. Both our peace of mind and our eternal destiny depend upon our ability to base these decisions on principles that are true and right.

The prayer of Solomon is repeated again and again by every thoughtful person, *Give thy servant therefore an understanding mind . . . that I may discern between good and evil . . .*¹

Successful living in our modern age may therefore be defined as a task of "re-arranging price tags." The world we see about us is like a huge department store window, in which some prankster has mixed up all the price marks. Cheap and shoddy merchandise is priced in three and four figures, while articles of infinite value are marked at dime-store prices. It is our responsibility to judge accurately the worth of each article and to label it accordingly. Our faculties for judging are too erratic to accomplish a perfect job, but we will achieve far greater success when we have learned how God wants the price tags arranged. We can be thankful that He has not left us without guidance sufficient for our daily need.

Be On the Alert for Camels

The gospels indicate that Jesus was constantly helping people to develop right principles for judging true values. *Of how much more value is a man than a sheep!* He exclaimed (*Matthew 12:12*). Birds of the air have a genuine worth to God, but human beings are of more value than they (*Matthew 6:26*). Even among the commandments, some are "least" and some are great (*Matthew 5:19; Matthew 23:23, 24*).

Perhaps the greatest fault with many of the Pharisees we meet in the gospels was their inability to distinguish the important issues of life from the unimportant. They had made a terrific mess of rightly arranging the price tags. For example, to earmark a sum of money for God cancelled out one's duty to his father and mother (*Matthew 15:1-6*).

¹ I Kings 3:9. Moffatt translates: *So grant thy servant a thoughtful mind, . . . that I may distinguish right and wrong.* From the Bible—A New Translation by James Moffatt—copyright in 1922—1935 and 1950 by Harper and Brothers. Used by permission.

To tithe the herbs in one's kitchen—the parsley and the sage—loomed larger in their eyes than the daily practice of justice and mercy and faith (*Matthew 23:23*). The gold that served as an ornament to the Temple had higher validity than the very Temple itself, the symbol of God's presence with His people! (*Matthew 23:16*.) It all seemed grotesquely ludicrous to Jesus who pictures a man earnestly occupied with straining out a gnat from his cup while a camel, hump and all, slips unnoticed down his throat. Before you smile too broadly, look in the mirror; you may find yourself gazing at a modern camel-swallower!

How Does God Measure Values?

God's standard for determining values is set forth in clearest fashion in an incident recorded in *Matthew* from the closing days of Jesus' teaching ministry. Our Lord is approached by a Pharisee, well-versed in the law of Moses, who says, "Teacher, you often speak of some commandments as being more important than others. Tell us, which kind of commandment do you consider greatest? What characteristics must a commandment have to be accounted important? What principles should guide a person in making distinctions between 'weighty' commandments and 'light' ones? How can a person keep from swallowing a camel because he is preoccupied with some troublesome gnat? What is God's 'primary requirement' from persons created in His image?"

(At this point read *Matthew 22:34-40*.)

As is always the case with Jesus, the questioner gets even more than he asked for. He wished to know the greatest commandment in the five books of "The Law" (*Genesis—Deuteronomy*). Jesus quotes two passages and asserts that His answer is a summary of the spiritual teaching of the Prophets as well as the Pentateuch: it is the essence of the moral and religious content of the entire Old Testament. Here, He declares, is human duty in a nutshell; "the value of any decision or any performance is to be measured by the love it expresses."

Hear, O Israel!

As a thoughtful Bible student, you may wish to turn back to *Deuteronomy 6:4-9* and read the Great and First Commandment in the same setting in which Jesus found it. Every synagogue service opened with a recital of these words. Every pious Jew repeated them twice daily as a prayer. They are called the "Shema," from their first word, "Hear" in the Hebrew language. "Heart, soul, and might" do not represent an attempt to divide man's nature into three parts but rather indicate that God is to be loved with the *whole* of man's being and energy. Both *Mark (12:28-34)* and *Luke (10:25-37)* have passages similar to *Matthew*. Note the addition, "with all your *mind*"; in a world familiar with the Greek use of "mind" as a special faculty, this phrase makes clear what is implied in the original—that the *whole* man is involved

in this response to God. "The clauses referring to heart, soul and mind are to be taken cumulatively, as meaning love to the uttermost degree; with 'all that is within us,'" says A. B. Bruce.² "The intention is not to distinguish faculties and powers, but to insist on a complete response," writes Vincent Taylor.³

Something Special: Agape, or Christian Love

Someone is sure to inquire, "This all sounds very nice, but can love be commanded? Is it not true that we 'fall in love' and have very little control over our feelings of affection or aversion?" We Americans are at a disadvantage here, for it is true that for most of us the verb "to love" is supercharged with emotion. Illustrations of this abound in our daily conversation, our "love" stories, our movies, novels, and TV programs. It is difficult for us to think of love as an act of deliberate choice, involving at first, mind and will even more than a warm flow of deep emotion. The Greek language had four words to express love, one of which (agape) emphasized the free, deliberate act of a person, choosing on the basis of personal decision apart from emotion or even the worth of the object. It is this word, rarely used before, that, throughout the New Testament, serves to express Christian love. The emphasis is on giving rather than receiving; on unchanging good will rather than fickle emotion.

This love has been analyzed into these three elements: recognition, consideration, and care.⁴ A person loves God when he *recognizes* the nearness of God, *considers* what He is and what He would have us do, and makes it his *care* to do His will. Every thought and act has some emotional overtones, but love described in these terms is far removed from a spontaneous flood of passionate desire. For Jesus and the Jews, this question of emotion was never serious, for they thought of love as something expressed in deeds rather than in feelings. To them, this commandment simply meant, "show by your actions that you love God and your neighbor." As one Old Testament scholar has said, "The Hebrews did not think of love as an idea or as an abstraction, they thought of it as an activity."⁵

Practicing the First Commandment of All

1) Reverence.

The "Shema" affirms the *unity* and *uniqueness* of God. He is different from all other beings. He is Supreme over all as Creator and Governor. He alone exists from

² *The Expositor's Greek Testament*, Vol. I (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmann Publishing Company), p. 277. Used by permission.

³ Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Macmillan and Company, Ltd. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953), p. 486. Used by permission.

⁴ C. Anderson Scott, *New Testament Ethics*.

⁵ From *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* by Norman H. Snaith (London: The Epworth Press; Chicago: Alee R. Allenson Inc.). Used by permission.

everlasting to everlasting. Hence, the first expression of love for God is reverence;—Wonder, at the wisdom and power of God as shown in all His works,—Awe, in the presence of His majesty and holiness,—Penitence, for disobedience, and Gratitude for His mercy and goodness. To worship is to recognize the supreme worth of the Being that is the object of our devotions. For such worship we were created; and in it, we fulfill our highest destiny as persons created in the image of God and made for fellowship with Him. "To worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God."⁶ As we seek to do this we are truly obeying the first of all the commandments.

2) Trust.

To love God means to trust Him; to depend upon His provision for one's daily needs; to be more "anxious" to serve Him faithfully than one is about obtaining food and clothing and the thousand-and-one other things we call the "necessities of life." Read *Matthew 6:24-33* as a description of love for God in everyday living. Jesus was constantly amazed at the lack of faith He found, even among His own disciples. Has He any reason to label you and me as persons "of little faith"?

3) Obedience.

Throughout the whole Bible, love for God is expressed in obedience to His revealed will. *Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams* (1 Samuel 15:22 and Jeremiah 7:22, 23). The utterance of pious phrases and even the performance of miracles is no substitute for doing the will of the Father. "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 7:21-23). The Scriptures make it plain that God's will is especially concerned with right relationship to other people, hence the very close tie of the "second" commandment, *Love thy neighbor as thyself*, with the "first." In our next study we will be giving our attention to the meaning of *love* for one's neighbor.

To Love Jesus is to Love God

To reverence, to trust, and to obey God is no problem for the person who has understood what Jesus taught concerning the character of God. Jesus had the most radiant conception of God that has ever been imagined. The highest and best thoughts we have fall far short of the glorious reality. With Jesus, it was always "how much *more* your Father in heaven." So completely has Jesus lifted and enlarged our knowledge of God that one New Testament writer declares that we are believers in God through Jesus Christ! (See *1 Peter 1:21*.)

⁶ William Temple, *The Hope of a New World*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1942), p. 30. Used by permission.

For Christians, however, an even stronger consideration is the assurance that in Jesus Christ Himself we have a revelation of the true character of God. To realize the significance of His answer to Philip . . . *He who has seen me has seen the Father* . . . (*John 14:9*) is to have a powerful incentive for loving God completely; with the whole "heart" as well as with the mind and will. His love draws out our own. The early Christians believed that the site of the cross on Calvary was the geographic center of the world. They were mistaken in this but in a far deeper fashion they were right. The cross is, in truth, the center of the Christian's universe, for it reveals a divine love that freely and gladly lays down life itself for our sakes.

Nothing less will suffice now save the answering love of our hearts and the devotion of our lives to this God, in fellowship and service forever.

Lord, Thou didst suffer more for me
Than all the hosts on land or sea;
Here Lord, I render back again
This millionth of Thy gift. Amen.

—Joyce Kilmer

Thought Questions for Chapter I

"The average American family spends five hours a day viewing television programs." Make a careful (and honest) check of the time you give to television, radio, newspapers or telephone conversations in comparison with the time given to private prayer, family worship, and Bible reading. We give the most time to things we value most—or enjoy beyond others.

The best method of Christian education ever devised is found in *Deuteronomy 6:7-9*. Think up one way in which you can put this method into practice in your own home within the next twenty-four hours.

How can you show by your actions that you love God with all your heart? In addition, to *reverence, trust, and obedience* one might suggest *fellowship* with God through the practice of the Presence of God, or sharing one's experience with a friend who lacks the joy and peace that is yours. What does it mean to do *all* to the glory of God? (*1 Corinthians 10:31*.) Write down at least *one* thing you have done this past week because you love God (or His Son) with all your heart.

. . . And Your Neighbor

Basic passages for your study: *Luke 10:25-37; Leviticus 19*

There Are Two Sides to True Spirituality

Genuine Christianity is always related to the practical concerns of everyday living.

It seeks to keep one foot (but no more) on the ground. Materialists insist on keeping both feet on the ground. There are certain types of spiritual teachers who seem to walk on air, recommending as complete detachment from earthly affairs as possible. However, for getting anywhere, one must combine contact with solid ground and the elevation of one's feet into free space above the dust and mud of earth. So it is with the religion of the New Testament, it combines two elements both the love of God and the love of one's neighbor.¹

I trust, therefore, that you were a bit dissatisfied and somewhat suspicious of the "spirituality" of the preceding study. Dealing with loving God through worship and trust, did it not seem too detached from the grit and grime of the place where we live? You felt, I hope, that there was not quite enough contact with familiar and visible objects, such as the family next door, a stubborn and unco-operative mate, the liquor store on "main street," the unpainted shanties on the edge of town. Praising God is not enough. Nor is the whole duty of man summed up in freedom from anxiety. Not even obedience to God's commands is sufficient unless this obedience extends beyond the *first* table of the Law into respect for the lives of others, fidelity in marriage and all the rest.

What Christ Has Joined Together

In the Gospel according to Mark and also in the Gospel according to Matthew, Jesus links with love for God, a corresponding love for one's neighbor. Many scholars believe that our Lord was the first to bracket together *Leviticus 19:18* and the great Shema of *Deuteronomy 6:4, 5*. In discussing *Mark 12:28-34*, Vincent Taylor writes, "Distinctive of the narrative is the way in which Jesus brings together two widely separated commands. While each is warmly commended by the Rabbis, so far as is known no one save Jesus has brought them together as the two regulative principles which sum up man's duty. Even in *Galatians*, *Romans* and *James* the second stands alone but as Jesus presents them they form an indissoluble unity; love for man arises out of love for God."²

¹ "The love of God is the precondition and the inspiration of the love of man; the love of man is the practical expression of the love of God." B. H. Streeter, *Reality*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927), p. 208. Used by permission.

² Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to Mark*, Macmillan and Company, Ltd. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1953), p. 488. Used by permission.

Dr. Frederick C. Grant says in his discussion of the same passage in *The Interpreter's Bible*, "It was probably Jesus who first combined the two 'great commandments' of *Deuteronomy 6:4* and *Leviticus 19:18b* into a summary of the law; there is no trace of any earlier teachers having done so."³ Certainly it is just like Him to search out the great essentials for life according to God's pattern and lift them above all minor and temporary considerations. These two are the commanding priorities of faith and duty. Really not two but one, for the second law is "like" the first: the word means almost "the same as," or "equal to the first." The necessary and inevitable consequences of love for God with the whole personality is love for every person who has a place in the heart of the Eternal. And that love is far broader, we must recognize, than the measure of our small hearts.

I say to thee—do thou repeat
To the first man thou mayest meet
In lane, highway, or open street—

That he, and we, and all men move
Under a canopy of love
As broad as the blue sky above;⁴

Let us endeavor then to gain a firm footing on solid and familiar ground in this second study lest we be reproved for gazing too exclusively into heaven.

The Key to Life Eternal

We can be thankful for the many Gospel stories of people who brought their questions to Jesus. Some of the most illuminating passages take their rise from an inquiry addressed to the Master. The Psalmist speaks of his desire to inquire in the temple (*Psalms 27:4*). We do many things "in the temple," writes Halford C. Luccock. We talk, we sing, we pray, we give, but do we think of the church as a place to lay our questions before a wise and understanding God? Jesus has an answer for us, when we come to Him with reverent and humble hearts. Let us pray for childlike faith and open minds as we turn to Him whose words bring light and life.

(At this point read *Luke 10:25-37*.)

The Meaning of Neighbor-Love

It is quite obvious that the expression of love for one's neighbor will be different from the expression of love for God. God is One and unique; infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. Our neighbors are numerous and have no claim on any of the words descriptive

³ Frederick C. Grant. *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol VII, (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1951), p. 847. Used by permission.

⁴ Richard Chenevix Trench, *The Kingdom of God*, from *Poems With Power to Strengthen the Soul*, compiled by James Mudge, (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1907), p. 164.

of God. Moreover, God is invisible and already has a full supply of everything He needs—save the love of all His children. How then shall we distinguish neighbor-love from love for our Heavenly Father? Using Dr. Anderson Scott's analysis of love as recognition, consideration and care we can speak of neighbor-love as, *recognizing* the presence of other people in the world besides ourselves, *considering* their interests as well as our own and *caring* actively for their welfare. This analysis has the advantage of putting the emphasis upon a resolute will rather than feelings of affection. In this sense one can love even his enemies, approaching them with recognition, consideration, and care; resolving to do the right and fair thing by them and to promote their interests as far as one can. (We must not, however, forget our proneness to set ourselves in a good light while we usually judge others with uncompromising severity.)

James Moffatt defines neighbor-love as "devotion to the ends of God in human personality."⁵ To love is to seek to help each person develop his God-given capacities to the fullest degree and to grow toward the divine ideal for which he was created. To love is to endeavor "however unpleasant and thankless the task, to treat our neighbors in such a way as to awaken in them some sense of the divine purpose for their lives." A guest in a home was asked to write an appropriate sentence in a small boy's memory book. The guest wrote, "I should like to help you become the person God had in mind when He made you." Extend that purpose out across the world to every life you can influence and you have the essence of Christian love. It is not easy to live by this principle in the complex civilization of which we are a part. Your love for your friends or for your own children may mean poorer schools for children on the other side of town, or of a different race. Christian love provides an inner attitude and purpose that gives to life a new unity and a full measure of excitement and adventure.

"As Yourself?"

The Scripture says, Love "thy neighbor as thyself," but nowhere in the New Testament are we told that we should love ourselves. When Jesus chose His own words and was not quoting the Old Testament He said, "*If any man would come after me, let him deny himself.*"⁶ Self-denial has a far more Christian sound than self-love. Of course, Jesus was careful to point out that through denial of one's self as the center of our little universe, we enter into life fruitful and abundant. The law of the buried seed, which is the law of the cross, admits no exceptions.

But surely "as yourself" has some abiding value as a measure of our love for others. Paul Ramsey suggests that each of us ask the question—"with what sort of love do I naturally love myself?"⁷ What are the characteristics of our con-

⁵ James Moffatt, *Love in the New Testament*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930), p. 44. Used by permission.

⁶ See for example *Luke 9:23, 24* and *John 12:24, 25*.

⁷ Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1950), pp. 99-100. Used by permission.

sideration for ourselves? Here are some suggestions. First of all, each of us thinks of himself as an *individual*. We distinguish ourselves as persons from every other person. We do not lump ourselves with others in some mass group, based on race or class or nationality. We see ourselves as single individual persons with individual hopes and fears and needs.

To love your neighbor "as yourself" is to see every person as a distinct individual entitled to your respect, your consideration, your personal help. While each of us sees himself as a separate individual, we tend often to herd others into groups and make sweeping generalizations about these groups.

Again, your self-love is not dependent upon your moral worth at the moment. Whether you are good or bad this love remains steady and unchanging. The question of worth, of personal merit, is seldom raised—it is taken for granted that "I am worth consideration simply because I am I."

Love of self is also independent of fluctuations in feeling. Some days are bright and sunny, others are dark and dreary, but the intensity of our regard for self stays about the same day in and day out. If anything, it tends to increase when things go wrong. Moreover we are quick to "justify ourselves," to excuse and forgive our wrongdoing. Love for neighbor must share both this independence of moral worth and of fluctuations of feeling.

Self-love is usually a very definite and practical sort of thing. It ends in action. We buy new clothes, we visit a soda fountain, we go to the movies. There is nothing vague or theoretical about this inner regard for ourselves, it quickly takes control of our motor-nerves and *does* something.

One thing more can be said, our self-love leads us to always desire our own good. We plan and strive for what we believe is best for ourselves. What we conceive as our own highest welfare is a constant objective. All these facts from self-knowledge become tests for the kind of love we are to have for others. "Christian love means love for self *inverted*. . . . The commandment requires the Christian to aim at his neighbor's good just as unswervingly as man by nature wishes his own."⁸

But There Must Be a Boundary Line Somewhere!

Jesus' solution that eternal life can be gained by loving God and one's neighbor with the entire being seemed too simple and brief an answer for the learned teacher of Mosaic law. He had anticipated a lengthy discussion. Wishing to put himself in the right, and justify his question, he points out that the answer given needs clarification since it leaves the meaning of neighbor in doubt. If you turn to *Leviticus 19:1-18* you will find several synonyms used for "neighbor"—*thy people, thy brother, the children of thy people, one another*. It is clear from these that neighbor meant originally "fellow Israelite," a member of your own race and nation. The teaching of the Prophets, the ferment of God's Spirit in the human heart and widening

⁸ Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics*, p. 100. Used by permission.

experience had already broadened and extended the concept of neighbor. An occasional rabbi might be found who would say, "If a Gentile fall into the sea you need not take him out for he is not thy neighbor." Characteristic of the more thoughtful, however, is the rabbi who declared that the greatest principle of human conduct is not found in *Leviticus 19*, but in the story of man's creation in the image of God. The intensely interesting short stories of *Jonah* and of *Ruth* plead eloquently for this larger concept of neighbor-love.

For a Jew (or a Christian) to ask "Who is my neighbor?" really means that he wants to know whom he need *not* love. "Where is the line to be drawn beyond which I need *not* go?" In the parable we call *The Good Samaritan* Jesus makes it as clear as a mountain lake on a cloudless day that our neighbor is *any* person who has fallen into trouble whom we are in a position to help. The race, religion and nationality of the wounded traveler are unknown. The *King James Version* calls him "a certain man." Neighbor-love does not wait for the theologians to reach an agreement nor for carefully defined rules to be established but is ready to respond without delay wherever there is pain or sorrow, trouble or injustice. In fact, Jesus makes a point which seems to carry a special warning for all who are engaged in this study. A certain kind of absorption in worship services, in Bible study and in "religious" activities may actually fail to quicken in us genuine compassion and a love that is active and practical! The priest studied and *taught* the law of Moses. The Levite sang about it in lovely cadences but neither priest nor Levite had learned to put his religion into practice along the road he habitually traveled. The Samaritan did not have the religious advantages that were so familiar to the priest and Levite, yet *he* becomes the teacher and exemplar of the essence of their religion.

Read the story again (*Luke 10:30-36*) noting the lavish and almost extravagant quality of the Samaritan's service to the traveler in need. How many things did he do to minister to this victim of human greed? Was every one of these absolutely necessary? Did he not go beyond the demands of duty? Does not his service express marvelous self-denial in personal comfort together with thoughtful provision for further care when he could no longer render the service in his own person? The practice of such love today by eight hundred million Christians would quickly change all peoples into neighbors and the world into the neighborhood of God.

Lord, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?

No one could tell me where my soul might be;
I searched for God, and He eluded me;
I sought my brother out, and found all three.⁹

⁹ Ernest Crosby, *The Search* from *Quotable Poems*, Vol. I, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1937), p. 162.

Thought Questions for Chapter 2

Find a hymn that combines an expression of religious devotion in love to God with clear love (or service) to one's neighbor. Make a list of hymns which seem to assume that religion is chiefly a private, individual matter. (A purely "vertical" relationship without horizontal implications.)

Is there any reasonable basis for John's position that "He who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen"? (1 John 4:20.) Can you love a person without loving the things (or persons) that he loves? Can you love a person without sharing his purposes and activities? (Colossians 1:28, 29.) Can you love a person without, in some measure, becoming like that person in character and interests? (Deuteronomy 10:18, 19a.)

Distinguish by clear definition, or description, the difference (if any) between the love of wife and husband; the love of family, and blood kindred; the love of one's congenial friends and Christian love for one's neighbor.

It has been said that Christian love is but the extension of the kind of love expressed within a family group, to include every person in the world. Can you support this with Scripture—or can you prove it false?

Before you lay aside this study, determine on some course of action that will conform to the pattern of love set by the Samaritan—it must be a personal service; it must involve sacrifice of time and energy (as well as money); it must disregard color, creed or class. Remind your group that Samaritan love would include measures positive to prevent highway robbery and to reform the robbers. Are you engaged in the support of such measures?

In Search of Love's Source

(The Discovery of Love in the Old Testament)

Basic passages for your study: *Deuteronomy* 10—11; *Hosea* 11; *Isaiah* 53

God of Wrath—or Lord of Love?

In the Negro miracle play *The Green Pastures* by Marc Connelly, a prophet's shadow moving across the "office" wall in heaven becomes a source of great annoyance to "the Lord." The prophet's name is Hosea. His message to Israel had been a ringing assurance of the mercy and forgiving grace of God. At this very moment, exasperated with the wickedness of men, the Lord—in the play—has utterly renounced His people, and solemnly declared that He will deliver them from their enemies no more. But the Lord cannot forget Hosea's description of Him, the one true God, as a God of mercy and not of wrath. It is through his own suffering that Hosea had reached this conviction of the divine qualities of forgiveness and mercy, we are informed. So "the Lord" in a moving scene, suggestive of Calvary, decides to suffer for men instead of destroying them with thunderbolts, and the play closes with a triumphant chorus, *Hallelujah, God of Mercy, Lord of Love*.¹

It is refreshing to find in a modern play such a keen insight into the significance of Biblical personalities, for Hosea does indeed occupy a worthy place in this story of the unfolding of God's love in the Old Testament.

Deuteronomy: Where Love for God is First Emphasized

Jesus declared that the sum of religion is to be found in love to God and love to man. Into these two channels of devotion and service, a person is to pour the entire energies of his being. Our Lord added that a thoughtful study of the Law and Prophets (that is, the Old Testament) would reveal that these two duties express the very essence of divine revelation. It is possible that your first survey of the Bible that Jesus knew will be disappointing in the emphasis on love that you find. Of the eighteen books from *Genesis* to *Psalms*, there is hardly a reference to man's duty to love God. The addresses of Moses in the *Book of Deuteronomy* (from which Jesus quoted) form a single important exception.² The purpose of these orations of stately and moving eloquence is to imbue the whole life of the people of Israel with love for God. So warm and rich is the writer's own glow of devotion that it cannot fail to kindle enthusiasm and affection in the heart of the reader or the

¹ Marc Connelly, *The Green Pastures*, (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1930), pp. 129-141.

² See *Exodus* 20:6; *Joshua* 22:5; 23:11; *I Kings* 3:3; *Nehemiah* 1:5. All of these seem to reflect the language and thought of *Deuteronomy*. For *Judges* 5:31, see RSV.

hearer. Jesus must have learned to love this book in the synagogue at Nazareth, for He made it so much a part of His own life that He could draw unerringly from its truths in the hour of temptation or decision. Consider the passage *Deuteronomy 10:12—11:1*. Read these verses aloud. How many times is Israel commanded to love God in these twelve verses? In the *Book of Deuteronomy* as a whole there is a total of ten passages with similar instructions. You may also notice the variety of words used as synonyms for "love"; such as *fear Him, walk in His ways, serve Him, keep His commandments, obey Him, cleave to Him, . . .* Notice also that love for God is demonstrated by imitation of His behavior in showing kindness to the helpless and unprotected, and befriending even the dependent foreigner with a warm and sincere affection. Can this be an early pattern of the *Sermon on the Mount*? Compare *Luke 6:27, 28*. Consider also the inward and comprehensive nature of such love. Does it wait for rules? Will it stop with the fulfillment of minimum "duty"?³

The "Fear" of the Lord

How shall we explain the absence of instruction in love in the other history books of the Old Testament? One explanation is, that the writers prefer the use of other words which they consider more descriptive of their relationship to God and His relationship to them. Take, for example, the frequent use of "the fear of the Lord." To fear God does not mean to be afraid of Him, but rather to show by reverent and humble obedience the reality of our devotion to Him. In many passages "to worship" would satisfy the writer's intention.

*As a father pities his children,
so the Lord pities those who fear him.
(Psalm 103: 13; also 17, 18 rsv.)*

Or again, *The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil (Proverbs 8:13)*. Another expression used even more frequently than fear, and which also contains the idea of love is the word "serve": *Serve the Lord with gladness! Come into his presence with singing! (Psalm 100:1.)* Wherever expressions like these occur, we may think of them as calls to reverent and active love for God.

Hosea: The Marriage of God and His People

The earlier teachers in Israel may also have avoided the use of the word "love" in a religious sense because of its defilement in the fertility religions of Canaan. The God of Israel is a God of holiness, purity, and complete spirituality. He is without the passions and emotions that we associate with sex. There is never a suggestion in

³ *Deuteronomy 10:16* refers to the unregenerate heart which is closed in and therefore impervious to good influences and impressions. A teachable mind is essential for entrance into God's Kingdom.

Scripture that He might feel the need of some female consort as did the male deities of the nations around Israel. It may have seemed wise therefore for teachers to use language that could not be twisted or misinterpreted, lest Israel adopt the immoral practices connected with the Canaanitic sanctuaries (the so-called "high places").

It was the unique achievement of Hosea to take this pagan idea of the people of the land as "the wife" of their god and boldly lift it up, cleanse it, and apply it to Israel and to the God she worshiped. Hosea pictures Israel as an unfaithful wife.⁴ By her idolatry, her immoral conduct, her social injustice, her foreign intrigues, she was guilty of forsaking her true husband and going after other lovers. Like one who has broken her marriage vows, she deserves to be driven from the home of her husband and abandoned in shame and disgrace. But, however much this punishment was deserved, the love of God was so steadfast and strong that He would not desert her. His holy and righteous indignation is tempered and held in check by a love that never dies out. There is a premonition and prophecy of Calvary in this poignant cry from the depths of everlasting mercy:

How can I give you up, O Ephraim!
How can I hand you over, O Israel!
How can I make you like Admah!
How can I treat you like Zeboim!
My heart recoils within me,
my compassion grows warm and tender.
I will not execute my fierce anger,
I will not again destroy Ephraim;
for I am God and not man,
the Holy One in your midst,
and I will not come to destroy.

(Hosea 11:8, 9 RSV)⁵

After Hosea had redeemed and uplifted the marriage metaphor, it is frequently found in the other prophetic writings. See, for example, such passages as *Isaiah* 54:4-8; 62:3-5; *Jeremiah* 2:32, 33; 31:31-34; *Zephaniah* 3:14-17. *Ezekiel* also uses this figure as the basis for two lengthy and involved oriental allegories (*Chapters* 16, 23). The metaphor passes into the New Testament and is frequently employed with great beauty and charm.

God's Steadfast Love First Proven in Divine Deeds

The strongest and the best reason for the restraint of the Old Testament when pressing upon men their duty to love God has yet to be indicated. *Before* God asks for our love, He will *first* prove His own concern for us by plain and repeated

⁴ Date about 745 B.C. For the marriage figure see *Hosea* 2. *Hosea* 11:1-4 pictures a father's love for his infant son. In 11:9, "the Old Testament comes very near saying that God is love!" *A Theological Wordbook of the Bible*, A. Richardson, editor, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1950), p. 132:a. Used by permission.

⁵ *The Holy Bible*. Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 944. Used by permission.

acts of love. A person might inquire after hearing *Deuteronomy* 6:5 for the first time: "What claim has God upon me? Why should I love Him with all my heart?" The answer in Israel was not simply the fact that God was the author of life and daily provided for the physical needs of His people, though this is not overlooked. (See *Psalms* 104, 145.) Rather, the motives for a warm and active love for God were found in His surprising and inexplicable choice of Israel to be His own special care, and in the innumerable ways in which He had guided, protected, disciplined and instructed her at every stage of her history.

If God had not chosen Israel in the first place there would never have been any Israel. At two particular points, this electing—love of God is signally exhibited upon the stage of history. The first was in His choice of Abraham and in the promises and oath given to him and to his descendants. *Yet the Lord set his heart in love upon your fathers and chose their descendants after them, you above all peoples, as at this day.*⁶ The second period is the whole series of divine acts that brought Israel out of Egypt, established the Covenant at Sinai, led her in safety through the desert and on to victorious settlement in the land promised to Abraham seven hundred years before. Read *Psalms* 105 for a brief and joyous celebration of what these events meant to Israel. Life was far too short for a full expression of the gratitude and praise generated in a sensitive heart by God's goodness. Who is Jehovah? Why should Israel love Him and keep His commandments? *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage (Exodus 20:2).* God is first of all the God who has chosen Israel and delivered her from cruel and hopeless slavery. He is primarily Redeemer and Saviour, manifesting His love not in words but in marvelous and unforgettable deeds. The Christian's basis for love to God and man is also the basis for love in the heart of an Old Testament believer. "We love," a Jew might truthfully say, "because he first loved us" (*I John* 4:19). Obedience to the terms of the Covenant at Sinai on a basis like this is not a matter of grudging and painful duty but rather of glad and willing obedience. Writing in *Interpretation* a few years ago H. C. Alleman suggested that the "Thou shalt not's" of the *Ten Commandments* might well read: You *will* not. You will not kill or steal, or profane my Name, . . . because that is not the way men live who know the goodness of God and are bound in covenant love to Him and to one another.⁷

Seven Qualities of God's Love

Though we have by no means fully covered the revelation of God's love in the Old Testament, let us draw up a kind of summary as food for meditation and incentive to further study.

1. God's love is always *a prior love*. The initial movement and offer comes in every instance from the divine side. Human love of every sort is secondary and

⁶ *Deuteronomy* 10:14, 15; 4:37a; 7:8; 32:8-12; *Amos* 3:2.

⁷ H. C. Alleman, *Interpretation*, July, 1948. p. 302.

derivative; a response to God's initiative. *1 John 4:19* is as true of the Old Testament as of the New.

2. God's love is *voluntary*. It is not based on necessity or upon some inescapable obligation. Its origin and motive lie wholly within the Divine Being; hence, it is unaffected by anything else—that was, or is, or is to be.

3. God's love is *spontaneous*. It is not caused by the worth or the attractiveness or even the hidden possibilities in its object. This is very difficult for us to accept for we have never seen elsewhere a wholly disinterested love. Human love is based on attractiveness, kinship, or some recognition of worth. How recently did you hear someone say, "I cannot understand what she sees in him!" (or vice versa). Moreover we find it hard to admit that there is nothing in us worthy of God's love. *Amos* does not attempt to explain why God loves Israel (3:2). *Deuteronomy* insists it is not the result of Israel's greatness or goodness (7:7; 9:4). *Ezekiel* suggests that God's love for Israel is almost grotesque and does not make sense in the slightest degree (*Chapter 16*). Men were saved by grace then as truly as now.

4. God's love seeks *moral fellowship* with its object. Love is always a personal relationship. Because God is holy and just, men can know Him as Friend only by yearning in some measure for these divine attributes. Micah speaks for the whole Book when he declares that the one thing that pleases God is "*to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God*" (*Micah 6:8*). This conception is also expressed in the *Ten Commandments* and in the humane provisions of Israel's codes of law (*Deuteronomy 26:18*).

5. God's love is *an everlasting love*. He can, if He wishes, withdraw His selective choice but because "He is God and not man" He will continue to love, in spite of Israel's brazen and stiff-necked disobedience. Hosea found this to be gloriously true, and upon it the Prophets based their hopes for the future.⁸

The last decision of the recent revision committee for the Bible concerned the proper translation of the Hebrew word "hesed." In the *King James Version*, when used of God, it is usually translated "loving kindness" or "mercy." The scholars in 1952 after years of study, agreed that the Hebrew word emphasizes God's persistent faithfulness and utter loyalty in spite of the unworthiness of His people. "Hesed" is almost equivalent to "grace" in the New Testament. The revisers chose, therefore, as the best English translation the two words "steadfast love."⁹

6. God's love is *a redeeming love*. It is not frustrated nor defeated by our stubborn pride and fitful obedience. Through His "judgments," that is, His punishment of sin, God seeks to produce repentance. Through His constant offer of forgiveness, He calls men to confession of sin and renewal of fellowship with Him. When these fail (as they often do) God promises to work a miracle in the hearts of His people, creating in

⁸ *Jeremiah 31:3; Ezekiel 16:60; Psalm 100:5; Isaiah 45:17; 54:7, 8; Deuteronomy 33:27; Hosea 2:19.*

⁹ *Micah 7:18-20. Use Concordance for other examples. Also John Bright, The Kingdom of God, (New York-Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 28.*

them a new heart capable of penitence and willing obedience.¹⁰ In *Isaiah 53*, we have the inspired picture of a love that suffers for others as a sacrifice for their sin and in order to work a spiritual transformation in their hearts. With the promise of the New Covenant in *Jeremiah 31*, and this graphic description in *Isaiah 53* of the Servant *by whose stripes we are healed* we find that we are on the threshold of the New Testament. Indeed we are ready to enter a certain Upper Room where a Galilean Carpenter breaks the bread with His strong hands and offers His friends the wine of a New Covenant as a perpetual reminder of His steadfast love.

7. God's love has in view an offer of salvation to *all nations*. God chooses Israel and does for her far more than ordinary love requires in order that there might one day be a Gospel of redemption, universal in its scope and appeal. This is not overlooked when Abraham is called (*Genesis 12:1-3*), but was often forgotten as Israel struggled for her very existence and for her precious heritage amid an ever-threatening flood of heathenism. Amos sees the divine providence at work in other nations. (*Amos 9:7*). Later prophets give us glimpses of the peoples of the world on the way to faith in the one true God (*Isaiah 2:2-4*).¹¹ In the latter part of *Isaiah* we come back again to the glorious truth that the plan of God from the beginning has as its goal the redemption of all mankind (*Isaiah 45:18-23*).¹² If one, however, is still inclined to doubt that *God so loved the world* let him go and sit awhile with Jonah as he sulks under his withered gourd vine, much displeased because of God's great pity for Ninevah with her thousands of little children and much cattle.

¹⁰ *Jeremiah 31:31-34; Ezekiel 36:25-27; 37:11-14* (the dry bones).

¹¹ Also *Jeremiah 16:19, 20; Ezekiel 16:61* and especially *Isaiah 19:19-25*.

¹² This has been called "the greatest passage in the Old Testament." See also *Isaiah 42:1-9; 49:6; 51:4, 5; Psalms 22:27; 65:67*.

Thought Questions for Chapter 3

Here is a major project for one (or several persons) over a considerable period of 1955. Our concept of religious love may be compared to a tennis ball thrown with considerable force that breaks into two balls when it strikes an object and bounces off in two directions (vertical and horizontal). God's love for us is the original force behind the moving ball. Our love for God and our love for our neighbor are the two responses or rebounds that result when we become aware of God's love for us. Read rapidly through the Old Testament making a list of the passages of Scripture that speak: 1) of God's love for us, 2) of our love for God, 3) of our love for our fellowmen. You will be surprised at the brevity of each list. You can add to your list by thoughtful search for a) passages that show love in action (example under [1] *Exodus 20:2; Jeremiah 31:34c, Isaiah 58:6-8 or Job 31*); or b) the use of various words that express ideas closely related to love, such as "mercy," "faithfulness," "forgiveness" and others of like nature.

Similar projects may be planned for the four Gospels (Chapter 4) and for the rest of the New Testament (Chapters 5 and 6).

In Chapter 3, seven statements are made descriptive of God's love for us; how many of these can be used to describe the kind of love we should have for our neighbor? In what quality is your own love most deficient?

In *Isaiah 53* list the statements indicating: 1) the righteous and innocent character of the Servant of the Lord, 2) that He *voluntarily* bore the sin of many, 3) that God approved and rewarded Him for His vicarious offering of Himself for sin, 4) that His suffering worked a transformation in the hearts of those who understood. Paul calls love like this "the power of God" (*1 Corinthians 1:18, 24*). Have you experienced in some form the enormous strength of such love? Have you voluntarily taken upon yourself enough of human sadness and despair to become a channel of such vicarious, redeeming power?

Love's Standard: — "As I Have Loved You"

Basic passages for your study: *Mark 12:1-12; Matthew 1; John 13; Luke 6:27-36*

What More Could God Do?

There is a beautiful love song in the *Book of Isaiah* which describes the care and thoughtfulness which God has lavished upon his "vineyard," the people of Israel and Judah. When, in spite of all his interest and attention, the vineyard produces nothing but the wild grapes of violence and injustice, the disappointed owner cries out, *What more was there to do for my vineyard, that I have not done in it? (Isaiah 5:1-7.)* The answer of any fair-minded person would seem to be "There is nothing that you have failed to provide. Everything possible has been done for this, your pleasant planting." Certainly our review of God's marvelous love shown in deed and word throughout the Old Testament would support this conclusion. From the call of Abraham in *Genesis* to the vicarious suffering of the Lord's servant in *Isaiah 53*, the divine love was poured out without measure for the training and perfection of His people. It would seem that even the boundless resources of heaven itself had been exhausted in this labor of love. What more could love do? "Nothing," do you say?

Perhaps you recall that Jesus also has a story about a vineyard and a disappointed owner (*Mark 12:1-12*). In vivid phrases He describes the way in which God's messengers—teachers, prophets, wise men, and saints—have been shamefully treated when sent by the owner to get some of the fruit of the vineyard. But Jesus refuses to admit that God is defeated, or that the divine resources have been exhausted. God has one last supreme means to use for the winning of men's hearts. "He had still one other, a beloved Son; finally He sent Him to them, saying 'Surely they will respect my Son.'" Jesus is God's last resource for breaking through the barriers of pride, selfishness, and fear that we have raised to shut Him out. In Jesus, God Himself comes forth to seek us, taking upon Himself a true body and a reasonable soul, being born in the likeness of men. *This* is the answer of the New Testament to the question raised in Isaiah's "Song of the Vineyard." This is *the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (Mark 1:1)*.

Family Records for Forty-two Generations

Matthew 1

When we turn the page from *Malachi* to the Gospel according to *Matthew* we find ourselves confronted in the opening verses with a long genealogical table. If you have

been in the habit of skipping over this family tree with its strange and unfamiliar names, give to it a little special attention now. It tells us, for one thing, that the coming of Jesus was not a sudden afterthought in the mind of God. His birth was not an "emergency measure" but had been in preparation for some nineteen hundred years. The moral fitness of parents, the quality of family life and the birth of babies through the centuries are all under the eye of God. It was *when the time had fully come God sent forth his Son, born of woman (Galatians 4:4)*, to set us free from slavery and fear and to establish us anew in the family of our heavenly Father. History, declares Matthew, marched under God's control from Abraham to Christ. Is it not still firmly guided from His Sovereign Throne?

Our times are in His hand
Who said, 'A whole I planned';
Trust God, see all, nor be afraid.
—Robert Browning

Made Like Us in Every Respect

This transcript in *Matthew* from the "court house" records also assures us that Jesus was a full-fledged member of our human race. He belongs to the life story of our earth. His ancestors were real people like ourselves. He came into the world by birth from his mother's womb even as we came—save only that His birth was in a cattle shed—not amid the white and septic cleanness of a modern hospital! Like other infants, He ate and slept and laughed and grew. No one felt that He was different or even exceptional. He went to synagogue school in Nazareth and there learned to read and write. While still a lad He began to work with Joseph as an apprentice carpenter. After a long day's work He felt weariness in His bones and muscles even as we do. Careless people forgot to pay Him for His work. Deceitful men gyped Him.

I wonder what he charged for chairs at Nazareth.
And did men try to beat him down
And boast about it in the town—
"I bought it cheap for half-a-crown
From that mad Carpenter?"

And did they promise and not pay,
Put it off to another day;
O, did they break his heart that way,
My Lord, the Carpenter?¹

When He was about thirty (His younger brothers and sisters being now mature enough to take care of His mother), He left the little village of Nazareth for a brief career as an itinerant teacher and preacher. He healed those who were sick. He divided His food with the hungry. He gave courage to the weak; made friends with little children; pitied those who had lost their touch with God. He hated cruelty and greed, injustice,

¹ *It's Hard to be a Carpenter.* From *Unutterable Beauty* by G. A. Studdert-Kennedy. Used by permission of Harper and Brothers.

hypocrisy and deceit. While still a young man He gained the ill will of the rich and powerful. He was branded a heretic by the religious leaders of His people though worship was the flame of His life. When He cleared the court of the Temple set aside for Gentiles He ran afoul of the vested interests that controlled the building and its profitable market for the sale of sheep and goats. He was considered a troublemaker by the Roman rulers of His occupied land. His friends, who boasted of their loyalty, proved to be cowards. One publicly denied Him. Another turned Him over to those who hated Him, and sought His life. He went through the mockery of a trial; was condemned as a criminal by a judge who admitted that He was guilty of no crime. He was nailed to a cross, between two thieves, who were crucified beside Him. While He suffered in intolerable pain, His executioners gambled for the only piece of property He owned—a seamless coat. Those who were nearby heard a prayer more than once upon His lips "*Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do* (Luke 23:34). And so it was that He died, yielding up His spirit to God after six hours of torture. Certainly this man knows all about our troubles. He was indeed "bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh." He was made like us in every respect, that He might sympathize with our human frailties and give us the help we need in every time of temptation and trial. Here lies His power to save, expressed in His name, "JESUS."

A New Pattern

John 13

"The thing I miss most in my religion," said a thoughtful Jewish student, "is some life of perfect goodness by which my own life might be guided." The law was indeed given by Moses, but it is Jesus alone who has said, "*I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you*" (John 13:15). Prior to speaking these words Jesus has provided an object lesson in the humility and self-forgetfulness of His love. The disciples had been arguing as they entered the Upper Room over their respective claims to greatness and honor in the glorious kingdom of David that seemed so near at hand (Luke 22:24). It was the duty of a slave to increase the comfort of guests by removing their sandals and cleansing their feet of the fine and scorching dust acquired on oriental streets and roads. In the absence of a slave, not one of the twelve would demean himself by performing this menial service. ("Can you imagine *me*, the Prime Minister of the kingdom, on my knees doing the work of a slave!") What they were too proud to do for one another, the Master Himself did for them all. Yes, even the feet of Judas were cleansed, though his heart was already stained with treachery and ill will.

O blessed Jesus, when I see Thee bending,
Girt as a servant, at Thy servants' feet,
Love, lowliness, and might in zeal all blending,
To wash their dust away, and make them meet
To share Thy feast. I know not to adore,
Whether Thy humbleness or Thy glory more!²

² G. W. Bethune, *Remember Jesus Christ*, (New York: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1899). p. 124. Used by permission.

A New Commandment

There are some sects in America that believe that Jesus' example is to be imitated literally. But rather does not Jesus tell us that He has illustrated a first principle of discipleship? One proves himself a disciple of mine, He says, by doing for others whatever the circumstances require, however lowly the service might be. In a church, for example, she who sweeps the floor, or prepares the food, may have as much of the spirit of Christ as those who sing the anthem in flawless voice or deliver devotional messages. This rare quality of complete devotion is the trade-mark that distinguishes one who has truly been with Jesus. The old commandment to love our neighbor gains a new depth of meaning when Jesus added "Love one another, *even as I have loved you.*"

In fact, one may go through the gospels and learn what love is by observing Jesus' way of living with and for His disciples. There is His thoughtfulness in small things for their health and comfort.³ There is His patience with their snail's pace in understanding His mission and in entering the Kingdom through childlike faith and self-forgetful service.⁴ One can also look around that Upper Room and learn what love is. Peter is there, who boasts of courage but will lie and swear to save his own skin. Judas is there with a soul as black as the night outside. To him, Jesus offered the wine-soaked bread reserved for a very special guest, in a last appeal for his loyalty (*John 13:26*). The ten are there, not one of whom can be found a few hours later when their Teacher is in need of some true and faithful witnesses on His behalf. This group Jesus calls His *friends*, because He has shared with them the fullness of His religious knowledge and spiritual experience (*John 15:15*). In spite of their cowardice and slowness of heart to believe, He will lay down His life for them, and will freely forgive their disloyalty unto seventy times seven,⁵ for so God forgives. It was to these friends on the very night when He was betrayed, that Jesus gave the bread and wine as a reminder of His love; "My body, which is broken for *you*, my blood of the New Covenant poured out for *you*." The comprehension of a love like this, in its breadth and length and height and depth, is an agelong undertaking, for it does indeed "surpass knowledge." We can confidently rest our full weight upon such love, for neither death, *nor life* . . . nor anything else in all creation is able to pluck us from its power!

How Many Gospel References to Love?

We have focused our attention upon Jesus' example in the four gospels for, through His own matchless life, He has established a new standard of love. In the Old Testament the emphasis, you may recall, was first of all upon what divine love had done for Israel, proving itself in prior action, before asking from them a response in trust and obedience. So in the New Testament Jesus' own love for us must first be clearly shown in action before faith is called out. As Halford C. Luccock says, "Christianity came into the

³ *Mark 5:43b; 6:31; Luke 22:32; John 18:8b; 19:27; 21:13.*

⁴ *Mark 9:38-39; Mark 10:35-45; Mark 14:37; Luke 22:24.*

⁵ *John 15:12, 13 and Matthew 18:21, 22.*

world through the news columns, not as an editorial." It was first a divine act, its meaning for ethics and theology are worked out later. This may account for the comparatively few allusions in the four gospels, while the standard was being established, to our duty to love God, or Jesus, or even our fellow men.

In relevant contexts the verb "to love" is found in *Mark*, four times; in *Matthew*, six times; in *Luke*, seven times and in *John* 1—12, one time. In *John* 13—21 (an account of love's supreme disclosure on Calvary, written after fifty years of Christian experience) we find "to love" used seventeen times. John has found that in the exercise of love one comes into possession of both the life and light of the Son of God. (With the help of a *Concordance* make your own list of these passages. We will have occasion later to notice the *frequent* references to love in the New Testament letters and in the life of the early Church.) Just as the life of Jesus provides a standard for measuring the authentic activity of the Holy Spirit, so also the full significance of Christian love was not realized until His life and death had set for us a clear and unmistakable pattern; a pattern that bears the stamp of divine approval, for God raised Jesus from the dead and gave Him a place at His right hand. Now everyone can know that a person who in act or word fails to manifest the spirit of Christ does not belong to Him (*Romans* 8:9b).

Life in God's Family is Regulated by Love

Luke 6:27-36

In His instructions to His disciples, Jesus described the "community of love" which He had come to establish in terms of perfect family life. He taught us to think of God as our Father. God is like a human parent only a thousand times better. And, in His family, we are all brothers and sisters of one another (*Mark* 3:31-35). It has been God's plan from the beginning that Jesus should be the eldest Son in a vast world embracing brotherhood (*Romans* 8:29). This fellowship of those who call God "Father" and look to Jesus as Elder Brother is knit together by the ties of Christian love. Each member of the family will seek to follow the example of Jesus' love even as Jesus sought to give full expression to God's way of dealing with men. *He who has seen me has seen the Father* (*John* 14:9) expresses the central truth of the Gospel. *No one has ever seen God*, writes John, *but the Son of God*, full of grace and truth, *has made Him known* (*John* 1:14, 17, 18). In every Christian, the graciousness and sincerity of God must again be made visible in everyday living and commonplace activities.

As Jesus explains in the *Sermon on the Mount*, genuine Christian love cannot be confined to a small group of congenial friends. Read for example *Luke* 6:27-36. Love here is no puny sentiment but a new attitude that affects every possible relationship. Even the hatred and abuse of an enemy will be answered by actions, prayers and desires that seek to disarm his hostility. The aim is, if possible, to destroy him as an enemy by transforming him into a friend. However, the obligation to seek his

good is not dependent upon his disposition or his response but upon the unchanging disposition of God. Like God's love for us, our love is not to be dependent upon the deservingness of its object. Nor is it to be limited to the minimum demands of law or custom. In every case, we are to go beyond the terms of what is demanded of us even as we do in our own family life. Nor are we at liberty to turn away a suppliant, though the spirit of love will suggest the proper course of action. Nor are we to cease our active expression of love because there is no hope of getting something in return. We are not even to suspend the operation of love when there is no flicker of gratitude in the eye of the recipient. This is "the more" (*Matthew 5:47*) that distinguishes us as children of God.

Such a life of unselfish devotion to the welfare of others does not require exceptional abilities nor the IQ of a genius. All it requires is steadfast love for Christ and daily fellowship with Him. It was written of King George VI of England that "he made ordinariness shine." Ordinariness shines with an eternal glory when the Word becomes flesh again in us and dwells under our roof full of grace and truth.

Thought Questions for Chapter 4

List the references in the four gospels to the three types of religious love. (See Questions for Chapter 3.)

List from the gospels the ways in which *Jesus* revealed these three types of love in His own life.

"As I have loved you" we read in *John 13:34*. In what different ways is Jesus' love for His disciples expressed in the Fourth Gospel? Add additional ways, if any, from *Matthew*, *Mark* and *Luke*.

Where is Jesus' divine nature most unmistakably revealed—in the miracles? in the *Sermon on the Mount*? in His pure and sinless character? in His unselfish devotion to helping others? in His patient and forgiving spirit? in His confidence in His power to overcome the world? (*John 1:14*; *Galatians 5:22, 23*.)

If "God is love," then should not the divinity of Jesus shine brightest in stories where His love is expressed in fullest measure? Is it possible to separate the divine nature from the true human nature in these stories? Can it be that we "become partakers of the divine nature" (*2 Peter 1:4*) in the measure that we become channels of divine love and grace?

What would you miss in your life if Jesus Christ was "only man"? What would you miss if He was "only a God" wearing our human flesh as one wears a masquerade costume?

What *more* are you doing than others who have no faith in a Christlike God? (*Matthew 5:47*.)

What more is your church doing?

The More Excellent Way of Christian Love

Basic passages for your study: *Romans 5; II Corinthians 5; I Corinthians 13*

Let Loose in the World

"Centurion, were you at the killing of that Teacher today?" Procula, the wife of Pilate, asks the centurion who was in charge of the crucifixion of Jesus. "Yes, lady," replies the soldier.

"Tell me about His death."

"It is hardly fit hearing for you, my lady," the centurion objects. Upon her urging, Longinus (for so tradition names him) relates how Jesus had prayed to God to forgive those who mocked Him; and how He promised the penitent thief, "*Today you will be with me in Paradise.*"

A few moments later, Procula asks: "Do you think He is dead?"

Longinus replies: "No, lady, I don't."

Procula: "Then where is He?"

Longinus: "Let loose in the world, lady, where neither Roman nor Jew can stop His truth."¹

The death and Resurrection of Jesus have indeed let loose in the world a new power surpassing the power that created the universe and have inaugurated a new Way of Life for all men. What happened on Calvary has been transforming individual persons and reshaping human society ever since. On every page of the New Testament as believers experience this new power, we sense an air of excitement, a thrill of gladness, a warmth of affection such as the world had never known before.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ,
he is a new creation;
the old has passed away,
behold, the new has come.*

—II Corinthians 5:17²

The Strongest Proof of God's Love

Romans 5

As Longinus indicated, this new experience of joy and power had its origin in the death of Jesus. A tragedy so utterly hopeless that it filled the hearts of

¹ John Masefield, *The Trial of Jesus* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1925), pp. 109-111. Used by permission.

² *The Holy Bible*. Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), p. 204. Used by permission.

the disciples with sorrow and despair. "We had hoped that he was the one to redeem Israel," (Luke 24:21) they said, but when He died on the shameful cross, hope died also. At first, the reports of the Resurrection of Christ seemed too good to be true, but when the disciples were once convinced that their Master and Friend was indeed alive—nothing, absolutely nothing, was "too good" to be true. *He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, will he not also give us all things with him?* (Romans 8:32.) So they believed and so they lived.

Following that first glad Easter Day they had come to realize that the cross was not a black and meaningless tragedy but was the crowning evidence of the amazing love of God. He who had befriended Abraham and sent the Prophets to a nation that did not register any notable advances in righteousness and goodness, had refused to give His people up. In a final act of infinite self-giving, He sent His Son to die for these men who were still helpless in their sins and hopeless of improvement. To be perfectly honest, says Paul in *Romans 5*, there was nothing either of moral beauty or intrinsic worth about them. Once in a great while a man might be found willing to die for another, provided that other was recognized as a model of strict uprightness and fidelity to duty. If the person in extreme peril was known to be a "good" man, that is, kind, generous, and attractive, the motive to sacrifice oneself for his sake would be a great deal stronger. God's love goes far beyond such normal sentiments of human devotion, for while we were still sinning against God (without virtue or merit of our own) Christ died for us.

Notice how Paul moves with perfect naturalness from the love of God to the self-sacrifice of Christ. He was convinced that "God was in Christ." Christ had indicated that His life was nourished and His every act inspired by His consciousness of God's love and companionship. The one aim of His life was to do the will of His Father and to finish His work (*John 4:34*). So then it was truly God's love that was expressed in His every word and deed. In perfect measure Christ loved us with the love of God. There is no trace in Paul's thought of a merciful Christ appeasing an angry God and inducing Him to love us and forgive us our sins. It was the eternal love of God that inspired the sacrifice of Christ and that sustained Him amid its suffering and shame. The cross was planted deep in the heart of God before ever it was raised outside the walls of Jerusalem.

I sometimes think about the cross,
And shut my eyes, and try to see
The cruel nails and crown of thorns,
And Jesus, crucified for me.

But even could I see him die,
I could but see a little part
Of that great love, which like a fire,
Is *always* burning in his heart.³

To believe *that* with all one's heart is indeed the most glorious experience in all the world.

³ L. D. Weatherhead, *His Life and Ours* (Nashville-New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1938), p. 257.

All Things are Yours

Read slowly through *Romans 5* and make a mental list of the changes brought about by virtue of knowing that the last and strongest power behind our lives is Eternal Love. The list will include most of the things for which we hunger in our highest moments. The very music of the words produces a sort of homesickness in the soul: peace, grace, hope, glory, joy, free gift, righteousness, eternal life. 1) There is first of all, "peace with God," which is much more than peace of mind. It means we are no longer at cross purposes with the will of God and with the expression of that will in our total environment. Our self-surrender to Christ in faith brings about a real change in our relationship to God and to the world. Reconciliation rather than rebellion (*verses 10, 11*) becomes the new platform on which we stand and from which we work out our destiny. 2) A second assurance is joyful anticipation of sharing the glory of God, of which we have come so woefully "short" (*Romans 3:23*). God's glory is, of course, His character of holy and gracious love; His character as seen in the life of Jesus. The process of transformation is terrifically slow—it will take infinite ages to complete; nevertheless we *are* even now being changed into Christ's likeness from one degree of character to another (*II Corinthians 3:18*). 3) But what about the troubles and sorrows from which no Christian is exempt? Even these are seen in a new light. Since God is our Friend, suffering is no longer thought of as an evidence of divine displeasure, but is recognized and accepted as a means of moral progress. Instead of leading to despair, it leads through endurance to stronger character and livelier hopes. 4) Not even thoughts of the Last Judgment (the "wrath,"—*Romans 5:9*) cause us uneasiness, for He who has taken care of our past sins by His own blood can be trusted to also take care of those that still stain our imperfect lives. 5) Furthermore, we are conscious of a new and continuing power in our lives, which may be accurately described as "Christ living in us." It would appear that Christ had done enough by dying for us, but that is only half the story. The supernatural power that even now fills our souls is nothing less than His life-giving Spirit at work within. Because this spirit is the Spirit of *Christ*, divine love like His is poured into our hearts and becomes the central motive of daily living (*Romans 5:5*). 6) In *Romans 5:12-21* Paul stresses the organic unity of the human race and assures us that through the work of that "one man Jesus Christ" the way is now open for *all men* to rise to a new life of righteousness. God's grace in Christ is more than a match for the power of sin and death, and has lifted us into a new order in which divine love reigns in fullest measure.

Controlled by Christ's Love

II Corinthians 5

T. R. Glover declares that Christianity was able to conquer the pagan religions of the Roman Empire because the Christians "outlived, outthought and outdied" their rival religionists.⁴ The opening verses of *II Corinthians 5* indicate why a

⁴ T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York: George H. Doran, 1917), p. 200. Used by permission.

Christian can outdie an unbeliever. Death is but the transfer of one's self, still vibrant with life from a frail and temporary "tent" to a new and permanent home especially made to house an immortal spirit. This idea is quite similar to Jesus' description of death as passing from one room in the Father's house to another room—a room where Christ has been at work arranging every detail for our individual comfort and happiness (*John 14:1-3*). The guarantee of this glorious future is the presence in us *now* of the Spirit of Christ giving us divine life and an ever-deepening sense of divine love.

Since the self we take on this journey into the unseen must undergo the searching gaze of Christ, Paul turns to an honest and unsparing examination of the pattern of his own life. His supreme ambition is "to please Christ." This is the strongest motive behind his prodigious labors and rugged endurance in the face of terrific hardship and opposition.

His critics may have to be persuaded of his sincerity, but God, who sees all and knows all, recognizes and approves his behavior. How could anyone be selfish or dishonest, knowing what Christ has done for him? The overwhelming love of Christ has cancelled out every ulterior motive and selfish ambition. Indeed the purpose of Christ's death was not only to bear the burden of our sins but also to release us from the self-centeredness that has marred our life since our first infant outburst of temper and tears. It was to "set the prisoner free" that He both died and rose again. Henceforth, the conduct of life belongs not to me, writes Paul, but to Him; to be directed by *His* mind and guided by the pressure of *His* nail-pierced hands.

Controlled by His love, all the energies and activities of my life, Paul continues, are now poured out in the twin channels of service to God and service to men. In reality these two channels are one, for God Himself is engaged in an agelong service for men, the task of winning the whole human race to Himself. On Calvary, Christ took upon Himself the guilt and doom of all men's sins, so that these sins no longer form a barrier between us and the Father of our spirits. Every man is now seen in a new light. He is esteemed as a thing of price, even as *one for whom Christ died* (*Romans 14:15*). He is also valued for what he may become—a new creature through trust in Christ and inner fellowship with His life-giving Spirit. It is the vocation of every Christian to be a herald of this good news and to make of his own life, a bridge across which Christ may walk into the lives of others. This is the greatest work in all the world.

There was no other good enough
To pay the price of sin,
He only could unlock the gate
Of heaven, and let us in.
Oh dearly, dearly, has He loved!
And we must love Him too,
And trust in His redeeming blood,
And try His works to do.

—Cecil F. Alexander

Make Love Your Aim

I Corinthians 13

But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way (I Corinthians 12:31).

Christian Love is Essential

In the exercise of every spiritual gift (*I Corinthians 13:1-3*).

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love,
I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.

And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge,

And if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love,
I am nothing.

If I give away all I have,

And if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love,
I gain nothing.

Christian Love is Essential

In the conduct of ordinary life (*verses 4-7*).

Love is patient and kind;

Love is not jealous or boastful;

It is not arrogant or rude.

Love does not insist on its own way;

It is not irritable or resentful;

It does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right,

Love bears all things,

Believes all things,

Hopes all things,

Endures all things.

(Reread verses 4-7 substituting *your* name for the word "love." Read again, this time using the name "Jesus.")

Christian Love is Essential

In the perfect fellowship of heaven (*verses 8-13*).

Love never ends;

As for prophecy, it will pass away;

As for tongues, they shall cease;

As for knowledge, it will pass away.

For our knowledge is imperfect,
 And our prophecy is imperfect;
 But when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away.
 When I was a child,
 I spoke like a child,
 I thought like a child,
 I reasoned like a child;
 When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.
 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face.
 Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been
 fully understood.
 So faith, hope, love abide, these three;
 But the greatest of these is love.
 Make love your aim.⁵

Compare with the translation by James Moffatt

The Greatest Thing In the World

Christian love is the greatest of all spiritual endowments. It is greater than faith because God's love is the basis of faith. It is greater than hope for the substance of our hope of becoming like Christ is through the perfection of our love. Love also surpasses other gifts because love lies in an area in which every Christian can excel if he so desires. Talents, as we well know, are not evenly distributed. Some have ten talents and some of us are not sure that we possess even one! However, in the practice of love, no one is under a handicap. Every one of us has an equal opportunity to exercise this grace, whatever our personal assets or seeming lack of them. "Love speaks a language that everyone can understand and that everyone can speak if he will."⁶ All that matters is a heart that loves Jesus and a willingness to forget one's self in thoughtful service to the needs of people—some near at hand, many others in faraway places.

Moreover, we never reach the point when we can write "finis" on the development of Christian love. The opportunities for growth in appreciation, understanding and in fellowship are unlimited. Like measuring the love of God in Christ, the kind of love described in *1 Corinthians 13* will require for fullest comprehension the co-operation of all God's children and endless ages of time. The call to devote ourselves "to the ends of God in human personality" is a call to permanent adventure—an adventure so thrilling that all other paths to pleasure lose their appeal. "To love abundantly is to live abundantly, and to love forever is to live forever."⁷

Therefore, make this love your aim. (*1 Corinthians 14:1*)

⁵ *The Holy Bible*. Revised Standard Version (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1953), pp. 196, 197. Used by permission.

⁶ John Short, *The Interpreter's Bible*, Vol. X (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), p. 195. Used by permission.

⁷ Henry Drummond, *The Greatest Thing in the World* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap), p. 40.

Thought Questions for Chapter 5

List the references in *Acts—Revelation* to the three types of religious love. (See Questions for Chapter 3.)

What proof can you offer that Jesus rose from the dead? What would you lose if the account of His Resurrection was nothing more than an idle tale (*Luke 24:11*)?

Point out as many similarities as you can between *Romans 5:1-11* and *Isaiah 53*. Beyond *Isaiah*, Paul knows that Jesus is alive forever (*Romans 6:9*) and that the power of the Holy Spirit is given to us (*Romans 5:5*).

The love of Christ for us in His death (*II Corinthians 5:14*) is the supreme expression of the love of God for us (*Romans 5:8*). Can you imagine any greater incentive to love God with all your heart and to live for Him who died for you?

Try to think of every person you meet today as "one for whom Christ died."

Can you do any greater service for your neighbor than to persuade him to be reconciled to God?

Paul makes no effort to be exhaustive in his description of Christian love. Write a few verses of your own adding qualities which Paul may have overlooked.

Love is . . .

God Is Love

Basic passage for your study: *1 John*

The Two Become One

An anonymous letter appeared in the churches of Asia Minor near the close of the first century. It opens without the usual salutation; it closes without farewell or signature.

The letter contains not a single quotation from the Old Testament, nor even one reference to the Resurrection of Christ, yet it combines in the clearest and most impressive way the two supreme elements of the Christian way of life; love to God, and its practical expression in active love for one's fellow men. Jesus had taught that *the great and first commandment* (*Matthew 22:37, 38*)* should always be linked with a second which is likewise great, namely, resolute love for one's neighbor. Here, as the New Testament closes we find the perfect union of these two commandments. Jesus was handicapped in His teaching on Christian love since the revelation of love's depth and motive could not be fully known until *after* His own completed work, His death, and His Resurrection. For illustrations of love, Jesus was accustomed to point out the Father's impartial and all-inclusive care as shown in His gifts of shower and sunshine (*Matthew 5:43-48*). Often He resorted to "made-up" stories of lost coins, lost sheep, or lost sons. Perhaps He came closest to disclosing the real nature of God's love in His parable of the "Wicked Tenants in the Vineyard" (*Mark 12:1-8*). But the wonderful news of God's redeeming love could never be told nor understood until *after* the events on Calvary and at the tomb in Joseph's garden. In the preceding chapter, we have seen how Paul believed that in these events God had proven the immeasurable greatness of His love for us. However, it is not until we reach this brief anonymous letter that we find a thorough integration of the Commandment to love one another and the Gospel of God's eternal love. It is only in the *First Letter of John* that we read—

We love, because he first loved us. (4:19)

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us; . . . (3:16)

. . . God is love. (4:8b, 16a)

. . . if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. (4:11)

*. . . he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot
love God whom he has not seen. (4:20b)*

. . . he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (4:16b)

Even more clearly than in the letters of Paul, we discover in this short Epistle that love is the touchstone of the Christian faith. John holds that no discussion of belief in Christ or of fellowship with God; no discourse on the Holy Spirit, or on the Way of Salvation, or on membership in the Church has any validity whatever unless it is related to the overriding principle of love. *He who does not love does not know God, . . . (1 John 4:8).*

* See first chapter, page 9.

This is a test we must now apply most searchingly to ourselves lest we shrink in shame from our Lord at His coming.

Now, We Know What Love Is

I John 3:11-18

Here for the first time in the Bible we have an attempt to define Christian love. Like other biblical writers, John is not interested in providing material for some cold unemotional editor of a Bible Dictionary. Neither is he desirous of adding a new chapter to our *Confession of Faith*. Perhaps a reader steeped in science will be disappointed because John offers no abstract description of Christian love. With John as with all Hebrew thinkers, love is shown in action. Love is recognized by what it does. *I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (Exodus 20:2). God so loved the world that He gave . . . (John 3:16)*. So here, we know what love is by a special deed carried out on the field of history. Love is made known in something concrete; "He laid down His life for us."

John is certain of his facts—as certain as any modern scientist. He knows that on a particular day in history, Jesus of Nazareth, whose life had been righteous and unselfish, voluntarily gave Himself up to His enemies knowing that it meant suffering, shame and death. Shortly before, He had declared in solemn words and Sacrament His belief, that His death was a supreme expression of love for His friends. Jesus was sure that it would be the means of sterilizing human wickedness and effecting a forgiveness that not only meant pardon but also would remove from human hearts the radical taint of sin. So, as the slow, excruciating minutes of that particular Friday laid bare the sorry story of human nature at its worst, this Man from His cross revealed a loyalty to His friends, a magnanimity toward His enemies and a good will toward all men far beyond human thought or imagination. Fortunately, there lay at hand, as though especially prepared as a suitable vessel, a colorless Greek word, "Agape," into which might be poured all the meaning and significance of His act of voluntary sacrifice. As C. H. Dodd finely expressed it, "It is strictly true, in the history of thought and language, that we know what agape means from the fact that Christ laid down His life for us."¹

Now, We Know What God Is

I John 4:7-21

"What is God? Our *Shorter Catechism* bravely answers. "God is a Spirit, infinite, eternal and unchangeable, in His being, wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth." This noble statement is accepted by many as just a little lower than Scripture itself. Time and again efforts to revise or amend it have been defeated. Instead we have

¹ C. H. Dodd, *The Johanne Epistles, the Moffatt New Testament Commentary*, (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1946), p. 85. Used by permission.

sought to remedy whatever defects it may have by adding to our *Confession of Faith* a chapter "On the Love of God."

Do you think it would help us to better understand God's nature, if we declared, as was often proposed, that . . . in His being, God is "wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, truth, and love"? Perhaps such an addition would bring us a bit nearer to the truth, even though God's greatness is unsearchable (*Psalm 145:3; Job 11:7; Romans 11:33-36*). However, that is not what John means when he writes that "God is love."

Love in John's thought is not one of the many attributes in God's nature. It is not to be listed as one member of a series which includes other equally important qualities such as wisdom, holiness, justice, . . . John would never have said, for example, "God is justice," or "God is truth." When he declares that "God is love" he means to tell us that love is the very essence of God's being. Love gives distinctive coloring to everything God thinks, or feels, or does. Every activity is begun, continued, and ended in love. "If He creates, He creates in love; if He rules, He rules in love; if He judges, He judges in love. All that He does is the expression of His nature which is—to love."²

For proof of this profound statement John immediately points to what God has done in the sending of His only Son into the world, so that, through Him, we might live. Here in *1 John 4:9* is a clear echo of *John 3:16*, *For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life*. To know the self-sacrificing quality of God's eternal love, one need only meditate upon the meaning of the death of Christ. That God should provide the means of our forgiveness and recreation at such cost to Himself reveals what is meant by the love of God. "The cross," says T. R. Glover, "is more like Jesus than anything else He ever did. It has in it more of Him."³ So likewise we can say, since Christ's sacrifice has its origin in God's love (*1 John 4:10, 19*), that "The cross is more like God than anything else He ever did. It has in it more of His real character than we can discover anywhere else." That is why we say in ever increasing amazement and trust, "God is love."

Now, We Know What It Means to Be a Christian

1 John 2:3-11

In each of the three passages of this letter that deal specifically with Christian love, John insists that to be a Christian is to live a life of Christlike love.

The example of Christ in His sacrifice is set forth as a pattern for our own living. *By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren (1 John 3:16).*

² Dodd, *The Johanne Epistles*, p. 110. Used by permission.

³ T. R. Glover, *The Jesus of History* (New York: George H. Doran, 1917), p. 178. Used by permission.

The fact that God's very nature is love and that He has proven His love at infinite cost to Himself gives added conviction to the new commandment of Jesus (*John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:23*). . . . *if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another (1 John 4:11).*

Even if one thinks primarily of God as light (*1 John 1:5*) that is, as sheer moral goodness, then, to walk in the light and to share in the light means to love even as Christ loved. *He who loves his brother abides in the light (2:10). Anyone who claims to abide in Him ought to walk in the same way in which He walked (2:6).** The imitation of Christ's love is the surest evidence that we are living in fellowship with Him. This does not involve sinless perfection, as John has already made clear, but it does mean that one endeavors to have the mind of Christ, to share the purposes of Christ, to show the Spirit of Christ, and to strive for the approval of Christ. To live with Christ after this fashion will mean that one obeys instinctively and habitually His new commandment to love one another.

The urgency of obedience is all the greater now, for with the coming of Christ the "New Age" has also arrived! Mark those present tenses: *the darkness is passing away and the true light is already shining. (1 John 2:8b)*. To refuse to live by the law of love is to attach one's self to a world that is at the point of death. It means that one has forgotten that only a person who does the will of God, which is a will of love, belongs to the imperishable order of the Kingdom of God (*2:17*). The sensuality, the materialism, the pride and the selfishness that comprises so large a portion of our own living today and makes us scarcely different from the nonbelieving world is on the way out. This kind of living met defeat in the death and Resurrection of Jesus. Even now the old order exhibits signs of decay and dissolution. He who practices Christian love has abandoned this dying order and its ways, and has become a sharer of the eternal life of the New Order of the Risen and Triumphant Christ.

Now, Put Your Love into Deeds

Perhaps it is well to point out that John has no sentimental or impractical conception of Christian love. It must be a love that is ready, if necessary, to make costly sacrifices for others but love also means the daily practice of charity and helpfulness. If there is someone who lacks the necessities of life and you have the means and power to supply them, then you will give him whatever he needs (*1 John 3:17, 18*). To fail to do this is to put your love into talk rather than into deeds. Love in every case must be both concrete and realistic. John shares his Master's contempt for a religion that passes by on the other side of the road. He is as confident as James (*2:14-17*) that pious talk is not enough.

Jerome who lived some three hundred years after the death of John tells an interesting story concerning the aged Apostle. The story may have legendary features but it is in perfect harmony with the message of this letter that bears John's name.

* "Ought to be living as he lived." (Moffatt)

"When the holy Evangelist John had lived to extreme old age in Ephesus, he could be carried only with difficulty by the hands of the disciples, and as he was not able to pronounce more words, he was accustomed to say at every assembly, 'Little children, love one another.' At length the disciples and brethren who were present became tired of hearing always the same thing and said, 'Master, why do you always say this?' Thereupon John gave an answer worthy of himself: 'Because this is the commandment of the Lord, and if it is observed then it is enough.'"⁴

Perhaps John himself might have added, "Yes, little children, it is enough if only you put your love into deeds and make it real" (*John 3:18, Moffatt*).

⁴ J. C. Ayer, Jr., *A Source Book for Ancient Church History* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948), p. 10. Used by permission.

Thought Questions for Chapter 6

Write out the statements in *1 John* that refer to the three types of religious love. (See Questions for Chapter 3.) Study those that indicate a close connection between our love for God (or knowledge of God) and our love for one another.

"By this we know what love is . . .," John writes in *1 John* 3:16. What characteristics of Christian love are revealed in the act of Jesus when "he, for us, his life laid down"? Does John feel that similar qualities must be present in our treatment of others?

What words does John use to describe a person who has no Christian love for his brother? What qualities belong to the person who loves in deed and truth?

If "love is of God," where is God most actively at work in your church? in your home? in your own life?

"God is love" declares John. If you dared to believe it what would become of your fears and your worries? What would it do to your doubts of God's goodness and care? What changes would (or, *will*) it make in your own attitude and actions? The plea of the world is "Show us the Father." Will you seek to live now so in larger measure it will be true of you, "He that has seen *me* has seen the Father"?

And so we pray:

Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace;
Where hate rules, let me bring love,
Where malice, forgiveness,
Where disputes, reconciliation,
Where error, truth,
Where doubt, belief,
Where despair, hope,
Where darkness, Thy Light,
Where sorrow, Joy!

O Master, let me strive more to comfort
others than to be comforted,
To understand others than to be
understood,
To love others, more than to be loved!

For he who gives, receives,
He who forgets himself, finds,
He who forgives, receives forgiveness,
And dying, we rise again to eternal life.

Francis of Assisi (1226)

